



National Department of Agriculture, South Africa

For release May 15, 2001

Climate Change, HIV-AIDs, Livestock Diseases Pose New Challenges to Agriculture

When hundreds of scientists, researchers, government officials, NGOs and others gather in Durban, South Africa, for a major international agricultural conference next week, the discussions will go beyond traditional topics like improving crop productivity, reducing soil infertility, or managing natural resources. The agenda for the annual meeting of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) reflects some of the most perplexing issues facing Africa – from the effects of climate change on agriculture, to the costs and cures of foot-and-mouth disease, especially for trade and agricultural competitiveness, to the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on agricultural production in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Recognizing the links between agricultural research and key issues on the national and international development agenda, the Republic of South Africa has declared May 21 – 25 “Agricultural Research Week” to coincide with the CGIAR meeting. The National Department of Agriculture is hosting the CG meeting.

“Agriculture and its sustaining force, agricultural research, are at the heart of any realistic effort to build the components of sustainable development,” explained A. T. Didiza, South Africa’s Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs. “We are hosting the CGIAR meeting because we want to strengthen our partnerships with CGIAR scientists, who include some of the best minds working in agricultural research. Advances in science and technology hold the greatest promise for improving the lives of the poor. Whether it’s a vaccine that wards off disease, or hardier plants that can grow in adverse climates and still yield a bountiful harvest, agricultural science can improve the quality of people’s lives in many, many ways.”

CGIAR Chairman Ian Johnson, a World Bank Vice President, calls the CGIAR meeting in South Africa “critical.” “Despite the progress we have made, the development agenda continues to grow to reflect new challenges: environmental threats, including climate change, water scarcity, land degradation, and loss of biodiversity; HIV-AIDs which affects 37 million people, the majority of whom are in Africa; and other public health concerns such as malnutrition, malaria, and water-borne diseases. Agriculture

alone cannot solve all these problems, but it can make a big dent in reducing poverty and hunger, and promoting growth in countries where most poor people live.”

Highlights of Agricultural Research Week¹ include:

- *Monday, May 21* “South Africa Day” at the Cedara Agriculture Center in Pietermaritzburg. South African and CGIAR scientists will release two new higher yielding maize varieties developed specifically for South Africa’s drought-prone, nutrient-depleted soils.
- *Tuesday, May 22* Sub-Saharan Africa Research Day sponsored by the Special Program for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR) and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), in partnership with the National Department of Agriculture and CGIAR. This all-day briefing will focus on the challenges and opportunities facing agricultural research in SSA including the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- *Wednesday, May 23* News conference and release of ***The Challenge of Climate Change: Poor Farmers at Risk*** with Robert T. Watson, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and Pedro Sanchez, director-general of the CGIAR’s International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) in Kenya.
- *Thursday, May 24* Special briefing on the Impact of Livestock Disease on Livestock Production and Trade with Hank Fitzhugh, director-general of the CGIAR’s International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Kenya.
- *Friday, May 25* Closing news briefing with CGIAR Chairman Ian Johnson and NDA Director General Bongiwe Njobe.

The CGIAR is an association of public and private members supporting a system of 16 Future Harvest international agricultural research centers. South Africa joined the CGIAR in 1996. The Centers work in more than 100 countries to mobilize cutting edge science to reduce hunger and poverty, improve human nutrition and health, and protect the environment. In addition to ICRAF and ILRI, the CGIAR has two other Centers in SSA: the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Nigeria and the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) in Cote d’Ivoire.

www.cgiar.org

¹ Precise times and locations will be announced.